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I WALKED THE
MORMON TRAIL
IN 1912

REA GARDNER

This is your uncle Rea Gardner. Born in Spanish Fork, Utah, Dec. 6, 1891. When I became 19, I was called on a mission to the Eastern States with Headquarters in New York City on 128th St. At that time it was a second 42nd St. Today it is 100% Black.

In March of 1912 I was chosen to follow the Mormon trail westward from Kirtland, Ohio, so on April 15, 1912, accompanied by Elder W^m Casper of Menan, Idaho, we left Kirtland, Ohio, traveling by foot without purse or script. My share of the total cost of that 6 months was \$21.00 plus I had to have a pair of shoes at Green River, Wyoming because I had worn out the shoes walking from Omaha.

During those 22 months I had experiences and observations that to me are pleasant memoirs and it is Lloyd's idea that I pass them along to you.

My attitude towards religion at age 19 was that I was not interested either way. However, since the call was to New York City, it was O. K. with me. I was travel-interested and to see New York City was worth it. "Give my regards to Broadway." "Remember me to Harold's Square. Tell all the boys on 42nd St. that I will soon be there." That was "hit" of that year.

First item was to have clothes tailored to uniform status including a Derby Hat! That was compulsory in 1910. Later such restrictions were released.

The first winter I spent in Albany, N. Y. There were 2 or 3 member families there. Several were friendly, so we had a weekly meeting of about 20. There were no other activities. Door-to-door canvassing was the missionary work. In western New York, where the church was organized, there were quite a number of church members who had not seen or contacted another church member in more than 3 years.

In April, Elder Peterson of Springville, Utah, and myself, were given the names and addresses of those members. We were instructed to visit 2 or 3 days (as we "saw fit"). Pres. Ben E. Rich felt these saints deserved a visit from the organization.

We visited all the historical places. Hill Cumorah at that time was plain grass. It was after the L.D.S. church was able to buy the property that the trees were planted.

In 1961, when I was on a bus tour in this area, I had a surprise worth recording. There were 40 in the group. When we came to the Martin Harris residence I found the caretakers in charge were your Aunt Ina and Marvel Marett! New to me was to see Marvel in dress suit attire. He looked really nice. I complimented him and added that the only clothes I had ever seen him in were "horsy." Right now. I quote Marvel's comeback to me. "I want to inform you all that this

Mr. Rea Gardner, my wife's brother, is the stingiest person I ever knew. He is so tight that he carries his teeth around in his pocket to keep from wearing them out." End of quote. Ha! Ha!

I have sprung that one quite often since. I remember that I came back at once. Quote "You are mistaken, but my father is so stingy he won't even buy a set of teeth. Ha!"

While on the subject I will pass on to you one that has reality to it.

I had quite a talk with a salesman who was driving a White Steamer auto. I can see that car today and him who drove it. He gave me his business card and on the back was the following:

"One comes into this world without his consent and leaves against his will. During his stay here on this earth, life is one continuous round of contraries and misunderstandings. If one goes to church, he does it for show. If one stays away, one is a sinner. If he donates to foreign missionary work, it is done for business reasons, if one does not donate, then he is a tightwad. One must see that all water and food is purified, one must eat nothing, smoke nothing, and see that air is properly sterilized before breathing." Ha! Ha! Ha!

We travelled as far west as Syracuse and then north to Oswego. I remember well the 3 days we picked peaches. This member was a fruit grower. Many of the places we found lodging with where dairymen. Not much effort to get food and lodging in New York State, but the further west we got the less likely we were to find it. Yet we made it O. K. My religion is "The Lord helps those who help themselves." My companion told me that the summer before his senior companion "felt guilty" about inconveniencing people. So we went hungry and failed to get a bed several times.

When we arrived at Joseph Smith's birthplace, we found it in not very well kept condition. So Elder Brown (in charge) asked that we be allowed to stay and make the place presentable. It required three weeks. The Mormons were not accepted as yet -- No one would do anything in any way to help at any price. We rather broke the ice though. A neighbor asked us to come and help him harvest his wheat crop. What I remember was that we forked that loose straw with a 2-tined pitchfork. Slow, I'll say, but 2 of us kept up with the threshing machine which was a small, stationary separator that a man fed by hand.

It was September when we arrived in New York City. I was really disappointed. Coney Island was closed, so I didn't get to see what the resort area looked like until years later.

Highlights of my 4 months in New York City were: Mostly acting as a tour guide for Church members traveling through. They seemed to feel that the church should show them New York City. I had no objections. Rather preferred that to tracting.

New York passed a law on drinking cups. I administered to the sacrament the 1st time individual cups were used. The service was rapidly adopted throughout the church.

Another 1st: I was sitting in the office one day when a call came from a New York paper. Quote, "We have a man here with pictures of the interior of the Salt Lake temple. The price is \$10,000.00" Pres. Rich informed them that, if they would wait a few days, pictures would be furnished free.

In those days, the Mormons were far from popular and the "secret" of the temple was up front. One of the workers in the Salt Lake temple had secretly taken pictures fully believing he could sell the same.

The church furnished every missionary with a small leaflet explaining the use of each area of the temple, with photographs. We were instructed to show this leaflet to any one desiring to have information about the temple.

Here is another story: This is good.

Elder Lewis from Arizona was assigned to work in New Jersey. He wanted to go swimming in the ocean. Church regulations were at that time, "No," because the garment must not be removed.

In the New York paper was a picture of a Mormon missionary wearing a bathing suit of his L.D.S. garments.

The instructions were immediately issued by Pres. Joseph Fielding Smith that if one desired to go bathing or participate in any athletic activity to remove the garments for that period. In the first World War they were instructed to leave the garment at home because they would be scandalized.

It was during Heber J. Grant's Presidency that the style and length of the garment was modernized.

In January of 1912, I was assigned to West Virginia. Charleston was the area headquarters. Similar instructions: Go visit with the members. Tracting, etc. are secondary. We stayed 1 month at one area. It was in West Virginia that I saw for the first time a woman smoking a pipe.

It was sometime in March that I got the idea of observing the Mormon trail westward. I put the idea up to the Mission President and the project was set up. We were to travel without purse or script leaving Kirtland, Ohio, in April. We were to make a weekly report to the local missionary headquarters.

In those days the Rand McNalley Co. published a map of each state with the section lines on the map so we knew within a mile or so exactly where we were.

Somewhere in Ohio I had an incident I wish to record. We always took turns in asking for eats and a night's lodging.

One night we were delayed. It was getting late. The lady that answered my knock listened to my request: "I am a Mormon missionary traveling without purse or script teaching the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we desire a night's lodging!" She responded with, "Yes, come in." For some reason I had nothing to say that evening and the same occurred next morning. The father went to work, the children off to school. My companion talked to the lady. It was over an hour before he showed up and we were on our way.

He informed me that the reason for his long visit was that the woman had seen me in a dream. She didn't hear a word I said but was intensely interested. Hence the welcome. He supplied her with literature and addresses she could use to further her satisfaction of the interest she had in me. This is a sample of being guided by the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Another incident along this line is worth mentioning. This one happened in 1926 just after we occupied the new church built in Santa Ana, California.

One day in testimony meeting, a convert told us how he came to join us. Quote: "I was born in Germany. I did not like the teachings of the Lutheran Church. I decided to go to America. I felt that there I would find the right church. I found nothing to my liking in Chicago, so I moved on west and felt impressed I knew by now what I was looking for. After two years of travel, I found the answer. I had seen a man in a dream teaching a Sunday School Class and the dream (I call it a vision) explained that this man represented the true Church of Jesus Christ. I have visited many Sunday schools. When I came here and attended the Senior Sunday School, there was my man, Elder Rea Gardner. That is my testimony of the Gospel."

Another incident is worth repeating. An investigator remarked to me one Sunday that she was due for an operation for a growth in the uterus. I suggested we administer to her, which we did. The following Sunday I inquired of her health and her answer was that no operation was necessary. The tumor was completely dried up.

This is the power of God delivered to an individual through the service of a fellowman.

Another Testimony.

In the area of Garden Grove, Iowa, we contacted a man who was getting aged. Here is his statement. "I was 17 years old at the time Joe Smith was murdered. I was a member of that group. We planned to kill the prophet and demolish things, but when the Light showed up at the moment of his death, we all became frightened and got ourselves away from there fast."

While in Iowa, we aided a farmer for 4 days harvesting his wheat. He had 2 binders pulled with 3 horses. The combine field harvester hadn't come into existence yet. The grains were bound in bundles. The bundles were stacked

on end in shocks to prevent damage from rain. It might be days or weeks before the threshing crew arrived.

We had a similar experience in Nebraska somewhere west of Grand Island where we were walking the railroad. The Mormon trail was visible only in uncultivated areas.

We came to a man driving two horses on a hay rake. "Where you boys headed? I am miles from town and need 2 drivers a few days to finish my haying." We stayed there, as I remember, 3 days. I drove 4 on a push rake. My companion 2 or a sulky rake.

The farther west we got, the farther apart any one lived. I remember one day we had walked all day never seeing anything but the wheel tracks in prairie sod.

One nice moonlight night at about 9 P.M. we ran into a fence and a prairie hay producing field. We walked on a while but finally decided to climb up on one of those hay stacks to sleep. To our dismay, we could see the ranch house from the top of the haystack! It was the only night in the nine months I travelled without purse or scrip that I slept in the open.

I think it is well to record the statement made by Brigham Young at the time he was being ferried across the Missouri River. They tell it this way. The raft was breaking apart. Men called out "Let us pray." Brigham responded by saying, "Get this raft tied together enough to make it safe, then you can pray all you want to."

Seeing the places the saints travelled through makes one contemplate how they solved the problems. It was here that President Young was sustained as President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

And this reminds me about the court proceeding about who was to have ownership of the temple square in Independence, Missouri. While visiting there, I happened to meet one of the twelve apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is the only church bearing that name. The Mormons in 1838 changed the name to L. D. S.

When the church bought temple square, the record shows that the property was deeded to the Presiding Bishop. The reason was they thought it was better that way, due to the persecution that was rampant at the time.

The Reorganized Church was trying to get possession along with the L.D.S. and the living heirs of the Presiding Bishop.

The apostle told me how it came about that they owned the property.

In Illinois lived a man by the name of Hedric. He stated that an angel appeared to him instructing him to purchase the temple square, which he did. I have a

copy of the title of that parcel giving the name and dates of ownership all the way back to the original homestead and patent.

After a lengthy hearing by the Federal Government, the decision was in favor of the Church of Jesus Christ, that being the name of the church at the time of purchase by the church. Note: The words L.D.S. were added later on in 1838.

So that is how the Church of Jesus Christ now owns the Temple Square. They are commonly spoken of as the Hedricites.

At the spot where Adam built his altar one can readily see it could have been. The rocks have become oxidized but remain in a position that it is easy to imagine an altar could have been there.

Corn grows high in the river bottoms. We always carried an umbrella for shower protection. I have seen stalks so tall I could barely reach the lowest ear of corn with the umbrella.

We celebrated the 4th of July in Kansas City, then returned to Council Bluffs. There were a few saints living there and on the 24th of July they all got together for a celebration. On the 25th we headed for Salt Lake City. There were very few people from Omaha west.

The early settlers built houses of sod which makes a decent building. While visiting with an elderly man he reminded us that it was at this place that Wild Bill Hickok got his reputation. He was hostler and caretaker at this express station. There were 29 head of horses and he was alone when three men made the move to steal the horses. Wild Bill was too fast with his gun for them and no horses were stolen. Wild Bill was one of those fast gunmen that served the law rather than fight the law. Speaking of horses, this man said in his youth he had a pony that he rode the 40 miles into Omaha many times in 5 hours.

The Chimney Rock looks exactly like the chimneys one sees in the southern states. For a couple of days, it was visible. But on getting close, one is surprised to see it doesn't appear that way.

I climbed to the top. Cut into the conglomerate rock was "Brigham Young, 1847." I managed to get a little higher and I cut my name: Rea Gardner 1912. I wonder if it is yet there.

At what is now Scotts Bluff, there were a few homesteaders. I remember that the only place we stopped was at Mitchell Ranch.

The next place I remember was Fort Laramie, Wyoming. That was really the jumping off spot for those going west.

We left Caspar, Wyoming, arriving at Independence Rock at the mouth of the Sweetwater. On the rock was written: "First meeting of the Masons was held here." I do not remember the date.

I was in the area where the Handcart Companies had their disaster. We came near having the same.

At about noon we had lunch with a sheepherder. It started to rain. The man informed us that there was only one house in the next 30 miles and that was his. "It will soon be snowing. Stay with the trail. You will come to a fence. Hang on to it. About a half mile south is the gate. My camp tender is there and he will feed you. Stay there until this storm is over." We were there two nights. We left with about six inches of snow on the ground. It was 30 miles to the next dwelling.

Pacific Springs is just on the west side of the Continental Divide, 90 miles from Granger, Wyoming. There was only one place at Eden, a homesteader, to get eats.

Here is when we really started to walk.

It was 28 miles to the first water. We walked that in 7 hours. About 3 miles further was the homesteader (now Eden).

The lady felt sorry for us since it was 90 miles to the next habitation. She gave us a nice lunch.

We saw a few sage hens at a water hole. With the first try, I stunned a hen. Hurrah! That will help! We were facing two days without food.

Along in the afternoon we could see the trees along the Green River. The Muddy angles to the south here. We noticed long past backboard tracks going due west towards the river. We followed the tracks and at the river was a cowboy's line cabin with bed and food. We cooked the sage hen. Appropriated 2 cans of tomatoes for the lunch for "today".

The problem was to get across the river. We found dead trees and wire. We fastened several trees together and crossed the Green without getting wet.

It was 31 miles by our map to Granger. We walked that in 8 hours. The tomatoes made the day.

A few miles north of Granger is where the trail to Oregon leaves the Mormon trail.

At this point was a post with a sign, one arrow pointed → to Salt Lake City, the other →, Oregon. There was a buffalo head inscribed, "Brigham Young, 1847."

At Granger I had to buy another pair of shoes. At Lyman, Wyoming was a ward. They knew of our coming, but we were late so most of the people had left. It was about 9 P.M. There were maybe 100 people who had stayed. We had a rousing welcome.

We arrived at Fort Bridger next day. The owner didn't think much of the Mormons, but he put us up anyway.

At Evanston we stayed with the Bishop. Next day, there was a sheep wagon where we had dinner. The last stop was with a farmer near Hennifer.

Just as we reached the top of the ridge, a thunder cloud hit us all at once. My companion opened his umbrella but the wind turned it inside out. We were wet all the way.

This is the spot where Brigham Young said, "This is the Place." One writer writes he thinks that the church historian left out the place that Fremont described.

For your information, the Donner party spent three weeks building a dugway down Immigration Canyon. Brigham Young and party used that dugway.

At the bottom of the canyon was a ranch. The lady said, "You are not going into Salt Lake City looking like that." She dried and pressed our clothes. We arrived at the Sea Gull monument at 8 P.M. Saturday night. We were two days later than anticipated.

The papers had announced our arrival. Several of my pals from Spanish Fork were there. At the Hotel Utah we had a real celebration.

Next day at Conference, President Ben E. Rich informed us that we had been scheduled to give a talk on Friday, so the best we can do is have you dismiss the morning session.

While I was gone, Father had purchased a 1912 Buick. So I rode the last 60 miles to Spanish Fork where I gave a talk in Sacrament Meeting.

Thus ends the Trip Following the Mormon Trail!